

# NEWS FROM ED MARKEY

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## **GAO RECOMMENDS MORE AUTHORITY TO REGULATE OIL AND GAS ACTIVITIES ON NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGES**

**Washington, D. C.** – Today Representatives Wayne Gilchrest (R-MD), chairman of the Fisheries Conservation, Wildlife and Oceans subcommittee, and Edward Markey (D-MA), a senior Democrat on the Resources Committee, released a General Accounting Office report on oil and gas activities on National Wildlife Refuges. The GAO report found that about one-quarter of all National Wildlife Refuges have infrastructure and facilities that support past or present oil and gas activity and that management and oversight of these activities varies widely among refuges.

GAO recommends that the Department of Interior seek legislation for additional authority so the Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) “can apply a consistent and reasonable set of regulatory and management controls over all oil and gas activities occurring on national wildlife refuges to protect the public’s surface interests (p. 43).” GAO also recommends the FWS enhance its management of oil and gas activities, including collecting and maintaining better data on these activities and increasing staff levels and training for management of oil and gas activities. Such improvements, according to the report, will improve the FWS’ ability to assess and manage environmental impacts of oil and gas facilities on National Wildlife Refuges.

“National Wildlife Refuges, like other federal lands, can support a responsible mineral extraction program,” said Rep. Gilchrest. “This valuable report provides an excellent overview of oil and gas activities on Refuges, as well as the strengths and weaknesses of existing management. It is my intention to review this report with the Resources Committee, my colleagues in the House and to work closely with the FWS to improve management of oil and gas facilities on National Wildlife Refuges to ensure it is consistent with the protection of the crucial habitats they support for fish and wildlife.”

“This GAO report raises serious concerns about oil and gas activities on national wildlife refuges. The Fish and Wildlife Service needs more money, people and authority to deal with the current level of oil and gas activities on refuges,” said Rep. Markey. “Although no new oil and gas rights have been granted on wildlife refuges since the passage of the National Wildlife Refuge System Administration Act of 1966, the legacy of inholdings and subsurface rights inherited by our refuge system continue to cause damage within refuge boundaries. This report makes clear that legislation is needed to give FWS the authority to manage oil and gas activities in a way that preserves the public interest. Certainly if FWS can’t cope with today’s oil and gas activities, it would be a mistake to add to its woes by asking it to cope with unprecedented new responsibilities such as the mitigation of drilling damage in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge.”

Specifically, the GAO recommends that funds be dedicated to provide the level and training of staff on National Wildlife Refuges with such facilities and to allow the FWS to collect and maintain better data on them. During the purchase of new property for the refuge system, GAO recommends that FWS

clarify regulations to ensure that liabilities associated with oil and gas operations are assessed prior to federal acquisition. GAO recommends legislative authority to clarify the FWS' ability to regulate oil and gas activity on Refuges with outside ownership of mineral rights.

Congress is considering the authorization of oil and gas exploration and development in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge (ANWR) in comprehensive energy legislation, HR 6. House and Senate representatives are meeting this month to resolve differences between them and to craft a unified bill.

The report can be found on the General Accounting Office website: [www.gao.gov](http://www.gao.gov).

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